

A
C H A R G E
T O T H E
P O E T S.

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A
C H A R G E
T O T H E
P O E T S.

By WILLIAM WHITEHEAD, Esq;
P O E T L A U R E A T.

Quasi ex Cathedrâ loquitur.—



L O N D O N :

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M D C C L X I I.

1762



A

C H A R G E

T O T H E

P O E T S.

FULL twenty years have roll'd, ye rhiming band,
Since first I dipp'd in ink my trembling hand,

For much it trembled, tho' th' obliging few,

Who judge with candour, prais'd the * sketch I drew ;

And Echo, answering from the public voice,

Indulg'd as genius, what I fear'd was choice.

At length, arriv'd at those maturer years

So rarely rais'd by hope, or sunk by fears,

I rest in peace ; or scribble if I please :

In point of wealth not affluent, but at ease ;

* " The danger of writing Verse." First printed in the year 1741.
to which this Poem may be considered as a sequel.

In point of what the world and you call fame,
(I judge but by conjecture) much the fame.

But whether right or wrong I judge, to you
It matters not: the following fact is true.

From nobler names, and great in each degree,
The pension'd Laurel has devolv'd to me.

To me, ye Bards; and, what you'll scarce conceive,
Or, at the best, unwillingly believe,

Howe'er unworthily I wear the crown,

Unask'd it came, and from a hand unknown.

Then, since my King, and Patron have thought fit
To place me on the throne of modern wit,
My grave advice, my brethren, hear at large;
As Bishops to their Clergy give their charge,
Tho' many a Priest, who listens, might afford
Perhaps more solid counsel to my Lord.

To you, ye guardians of the sacred fount,
Deans and Archdeacons of the double mount,

That thro' our realms intestine broils may cease,
 My first, and last advice is, " Keep the peace!"
 What is't to you, that half the town admire
 False sense, false strength, false softness, or false fire?
 Through heav'n's void concave let the metcors blaze,
 He hurts his own, who wounds another's bays.
 What is't to you that numbers place your name
 First, fifth, or twentieth, in the lists of fame?
 Old Time will settle all your claims at once,
 Record the Genius, and forget the Dunce.

It boots us much to know, observers say,
 Of what materials Nature form'd our clay;
 From what strange beast Prometheus' plastic art
 Purloin'd the particle which rules the heart.
 If milky softness, gliding through the veins,
 Incline the Muse to panegyric strains,
 Insipid lays our kindest friends may lull,
 Be very moral, yet be very dull.

If bile prevails, and temper dictates satire,
 Our wit is spleen, our virtue is ill-nature ;
 With it's own malice arm'd we combat evil,
 As zeal for God's sake sometimes plays the devil.
 O mark it well ! does Pride affect to reign
 The solitary tyrant of the brain ?
 Or Vanity exert her quick'ning flame,
 Stuck round with ears that listen after fame ?
 O to these points let strict regard be given,
 Nor * " KNOW THYSELF " in vain descend from Heaven.

Do Critics teize you ?---with a smile I speak,
 Nor would suppose my brethren were so weak.
 'Tis on ourselves and not our foes, or friends,
 Our future fame, or infamy depends.
 Let envy point, or malice wing the darts,
 They only wound us in our mortal parts.
 Besides, 'tis much too late to go to school,
 Grown men will judge by Nature's noblest rule,

Admire

Admire true beauties, and flight faults excuse,
Not learn to dance from * Journals and Reviews.

If fools traduce you, and your works decry,
As many fools will rate your worth too high;
Then ballance the account, and fairly take
The cool report which men of judgment make.

In writing, as in life, he foils the foe,
Who, conscious of his strength, forgives the blow.
They court the insult who but seem afraid:
And then, by answering, you promote the trade,
And give them, what their own weak claims deny,
A chance for future laughter, or a sigh.

You, who as yet, unfulfilled by the Press,
Hang o'er your labours in their virgin dress;
And you, who late the public taste have hit,
And still enjoy the honey-moon of wit,

* This is not intended as a reflection on either the Journals or the Reviews. They are not the Masters but the Scholars, the Grown Gentlemen, at whom the Author smiles; and who, he thinks, had much better not pretend to judge at all, than borrow opinions which never fit easy upon them.

Attentive hear me : grace may still abound,
Whoever preaches, if the doctrine's found.

If Nature prompts you, or if friends persuade,
Why write ; but ne'er pursue it as a trade.
And seldom publish : manuscripts disarm
The censor's frown, and boast an added charm,
Enhance their worth by seeming to retire,
For what but few can prate of, all admire.

Who trade in verse, alas, as rarely find,
The public grateful, as the Muses kind.
From constant feasts like fated guests we steal,
And tir'd of tickling lose all power to feel.
'Tis novelty we want ; with that in view
We praise stale matter, so the Bard be new ;
Or from known Bards with extacy receive
Each pert new whim they almost blush to give.

A life of writing, unless wond'rous short,
No wit can brave, no genius can support.

Some soberer province for your business chuse,
 Be that your helmet, and your plume the Muse.
 Through Fame's long rubric, down from Chaucer's time,
 Few fortunes have been rais'd by lofty rhyme.
 And, when our toils success no longer crowns,
 What shelter find we from a world in frowns?
 O'er each distress, which vice or folly brings,
 Tho' Charity extend her healing wings,
 No Maudlin Hospitals are yet assign'd
 For slipshod Muses of the vagrant kind;
 Where anthems might succeed to satires keen,
 And hymns of penitence to songs obscene.

What refuge then remains?---with gracious grin
 Some practis'd Bookseller invites you in.
 Where luckless Bards, condemn'd to court the town,
 (Not for their parents' vices, but their own!)
 Write gay conundrums with an aching head,
 Or earn by defamation daily bread,

Or friendless, shirtless, pennyless complain,
Not of the world's, but "Cælia's cold disdain."

Lords of their workhouse see the tyrants sit
Brokers in books, and stock-jobbers in wit,
Beneath whose lash, oblig'd to write or fast,
Our confessors and martyrs breathe their last!

And can ye bear such insolence?---away,
For shame; plough, dig, turn pedlars, drive the dray;
With minds indignant each employment suits,
Our fleets want sailors, and our troops recruits;
And many a dirty street, on Thames's side,
Is yet by stool and brush unoccupied.

Time was when Poets play'd the thorough game,
Swore, drank, and bluster'd, and blasphem'd for fame.
The first in brothels with their punk and Muse;
Your toast, ye Bards? "Parnassus and the fews!"
Thank Heaven the times are chang'd; no Poet now
Need roar for Bacchus, or to Venus bow.

'Tis our own fault if Fielding's lash we feel,
Or, like French wits, begin with the Bastile.

Ev'n in those days some few escap'd their fate,
By better judgment, or a longer date,
And rode, like buoys, triumphant o'er the tide.
Poor Otway in an ale-house dos'd, and died !
While happier Southern, tho' with spots of yore,
Like Plato's hovering spirits, crufted o'er,
Liv'd every mortal vapour to remove,
And to our admiration join'd our love.

Light lie his funeral turf!--for you, who join
His decent manners to his art divine,
Would ye (whilst, round you, tofs the proud and vain
Convuls'd with feeling, or with giving pain)
Indulge the Muse in innocence and ease,
And tread the flowery path of life in peace ?
Avoid all authors.---What ! th' illustrious few,
Who shunning Fame have taught her to pursue

Fair Virtue's heralds ?---yes, I say again,
 Avoid all authors, 'till you've read the men.
 Full many a peevish, envious, flandering elf,
 Is, in his works, Benevolence itself.
 For all mankind unknown, his bosom heaves,
 He only injures those with whom he lives.
 Read then the Man : Does truth his actions guide,
 Exempt from petulance, exempt from pride ?
 To social duties does his heart attend,
 As Son, as Father, Husband, Brother, Friend ?
 Do those who know him love him ? if they do,
 You've *my* permission, you may love him too.

But chief avoid the boist'rous roaring sparks,
 The sons of fire !---you'll know them by their marks.
 Fond to be heard they always court a croud,
 And, tho' 'tis borrow'd nonsense, talk it loud.
 One epithet supplies their constant chime,
Damn'd bad, *damn'd* good, *damn'd* low, and *damn'd* sublime !

But most in quick short repartee they shine
 Of local humour; or from plays purloin
 Each quaint stale scrap which every subject hits,
 'Till fools almost imagine, they are wits.
 Hear them on Shakespear! there they foam, they rage!
 Yet taste not half the beauties of his page,
 Nor see that Art, as well as Nature, strove
 To place HIM foremost in th' Aonian grove.
 For there, there only, where the sisters meet,
 His Genius triumphs, and the work's compleat.

Or would ye sit more near these sons of fire,
 'Tis Garrick, and not Shakespear they admire.
 Without his breath, inspiring every thought,
 They ne'er perhaps had known what Shakespear wrote;
 Without his eager, his becoming zeal,
 To teach them, tho' they scarce know why, to feel,
 A crude unmeaning mass had Johnson been,
 And a dead letter Shakespear's noblest scene.

O come the time, when diffidence again
 Shall bind our youth in Nature's modest chain !
 Born in a happier age, and happier clime,
 Old Sophocles *had* merit, in his time ;
 And so, no doubt, howe'er we flout his plays,
 Had poor Euripides, in former days.
 Not like the moderns we confess ; but yet
 Some seeming faults we surely might forget,
 Because 'twould puzzle even the wise to show
 Whether those faults were real faults, or no.

To all true merit give it's just applause,
 The worst have beauties, and the best have flaws.
 Greek, French, Italian, English, great or small,
 I own *my* frailty, I admire them all.

There are, mistaking prejudice for taste,
 Who on one species all their rapture waste.
 Tho', various as the flowers which paint the year,
 In rainbow charms the changeful Nine appear,

The different beauties coyly they admit,
 And to one standard would confine our wit.
 Some MANNER'D VERSE delights; while some can raise
 To fairy FICTION their extatic gaze,
 Admire PURE POETRY, and revel there
 On fightless forms, and pictures of the air!
 Some hate all RHIME; some *seriously* deplore
 That Milton wants that one enchantment more.
 Tir'd with th' ambiguous tale, or antique phrase,
 O'er Spenser's happiest paintings, loveliest lays,
 Some heedless pass: while some with transport view
 Each quaint old word, which scarce Eliza knew;
 And, eager as the fancied knights, prepare
 The lance, and combat in ideal war
 Dragons of lust, and giants of despair.

Why be it so; and what each thinks the best
 Let each enjoy: but not condemn the rest.

Readers there are of every class prepar'd,
 Each village teems, each hamlet has its Bard
 Who gives the tone, and all th' inferior fry,
 Like the great vulgar here, will join the cry.
 But be it mine with every Bard to glow,
 And taste his raptures genuine as they flow,
 Through all the Muse's wilds to rove along
 From plaintive Elegy to Epic song;
 And, if the sense be just, the numbers clear,
 And the true colouring of the work be there,
 Again, subdued by Truth's ingenuous call,
 I own *my* frailty, I admire them all.

Nor think I, with the mob, that Nature now
 No longer warms the soil where laurels grow.
 'Tis true Our Poets in repose delight,
 And, wiser than their fathers, seldom write.

Yet

Yet I, but I forbear for prudent ends,
 Could name a list, and half of them *my* friends,
 For whom posterity it's wreaths shall twine,
 And it's own Bards neglect, to honour mine:

 Their Poets in their turn will grieve, and swear,
 Perhaps with truth, no Patron lends an ear.
 Complaints of times when merit wants reward
 Descend like families from Bard to Bard;
 We copy our distress from Greece and Rome;
 As in our Northern lays their flowrets bloom.
 We feel their breezes, with their heats we burn,
 And plead prescription to rejoice or mourn.

 All present times are bad: then cast your eyes
 Where fairy scenes of bliss in prospect rise.
 As fond enthusiasts o'er the western main
 With eager ken, prophetic in vain,

See the mixt multitudes from every land
 Grow pure by blending, virtuous by command;
 'Till, phoenix-like, a new bright world of gold
 Springs from the dregs and refuse of the old.

I'm no enthusiast, yet with joy can trace
 Some gleams of sunshine for the tuneful race.
 If Monarchs listen when the Muses woo,
 Attention wakes, and nations listen too.
 The Bard grows rapturous, who was dumb before,
 And every fresh-plum'd eagle learns to soar !

Friend of the finer arts, when Ægypt saw
 Her second Ptolemy give Science law,
 Each Genius waken'd from his dead repose,
 The column swell'd, the pile majestic rose,
 Exact proportion borrow'd strength from ease,
 And use was taught by elegance to please.

Along

Along the breathing walls, as fancy flow'd,
 The sculpture soften'd, and the picture glow'd,
 Heroes reviv'd in animated stone,
 The groves grew vocal, and the * Pleiads shone !
 Old Nilus rais'd his head, and wond'ring cried,
 Long live the King! my Patron, and my Pride!
 Secure of endless praise, behold, I bear
 My grateful suffrage to my Sovereign's ear.
 Tho' war shall rage, tho' Time shall level all,
 Yon colours sicken, and yon columns fall,
 Tho' art's dear treasures feed the wafting flame,
 And the proud volume sinks, an empty name,
 Tho' Plenty may desert this copious vale,
 My streams be scatter'd, or my fountain fail,

* The Seven Poets patronised by Ptolemy Philadelphus are usually called by the name of that constellation.

Yet Ptolemy has liv'd : the world has known

A King of arts, a Patron on a throne.

Ev'n utmost Britain shall his name adore,

* " And Nile be sung, when Nile shall flow no more."

One rule remains. Nor shun nor court the great,

Your truest center is that middle state

From whence with ease th' observing eye may go

To all which soars above, or sinks below.

'Tis yours all manners to have tried, or known,

T' adopt all virtues, yet retain your own :

To stem the tide, where thoughtless crowds are hurl'd,

The firm spectators of a bustling world !

Thus arm'd, proceed : the breezes court your wing.

Go range all Helicon, taste every spring ;

* " And Boyne be sung, when it has ceas'd to flow." Addison.

From

From varying nature cull th' innoxious spoil,
 And, whilst amusement sooths the generous toil,
 Let puzzled Critics with judicious spite
 Descant on what you can, or can not write.
 True to yourselves, not anxious for renown,
 Nor court the world's applause, nor dread it's frown.
 Guard your own breasts, and be the bulwark there
 To know no envy, and no malice fear.
 At least you'll find, thus Stoic-like prepar'd,
 That Verse and Virtue are their own reward.

T H E E N D.

